

Angered by Israel's repressive measures, fearful for the nation's future and fed up with the American Jewish establishment, many participants were clearly searching for, as author Letty Cottin Pogrebin put it, "a new definition of what it means to be a friend of Israel." Nearly anything could be said as long as it was preceded by a recitation of support for Israel's existence, security, best interests and so on. When one panelist, Eric Alterman, was foolhardy enough to neglect this affirmation before launching into a critique of the power of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, calling it not only bad for Israel but for American Jews and democracy as well, he was startled to find a substantial minority of the audience jumping to the lobby's defense. This seemed to suggest that the same boundary-setting and fear of far-reaching criticism that plagues the American Jewish mainstream has its echo among Jewish progressives.

Thus it was unfortunate that a conference aimed at "re-constituting" a "progressive tradition" avoided some of the harder questions that radicals pose. For example, only Gary Brenner of the Mapam Party was present to represent the Israeli left or peace forces more militant than Peace Now. Nor was Noam Chomsky, an early supporter of the two-state solution, invited. Hence, it was encouraging to hear Walzer's remarks calling for Israel-P.L.O. negotiations, since after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon he wrote that he would "welcome the political defeat of the P.L.O." and believed that "the limited military operation required to inflict that defeat can be defended under the theory of just war." But the question not debated was why it took so long for influential American Jews to come around to the present point of view. At least Jerome Segal, the intrepid philosophy professor from the University of Maryland who helped shape the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, managed to point out during the closing plenary that the 1988 Algiers platform so widely hailed as a breakthrough was in many respects indistinguishable from the 1982 Fez Declaration of the Arab countries. That plan was accepted by the P.L.O. but rejected by Israel and the United States.

If the conference was any indicator, American Jews have more on their mind than the politics of the Middle East or Washington. This was apparent at a packed panel on the creative collision of feminism with Judaism and in the reception given the work of revisionist rabbis like Arthur Waskow and Zalman Schachter. Their rethinking of the meaning of Torah and Jewish tradition is as significant as the changes taking place in lay Catholic and Protestant communities.

The conference participants showed that there is now an energy among liberal Jews that has not been felt in a long time. Ambitious plans were floated for organizations to lobby in Washington for a two-state solution, and a network of progressive Jewish college students was established. Local activists spoke of the need for democratizing the Jewish "moneyocracy" system, which requires that *machers* give large sums to their local Jewish philanthropy before they can have a major say in policy. The forces of conservatism in the Jewish community may still be dominant, but the margin of liberal hope is growing.

MICAH L. SIFRY

Rainbow Future

The Rainbow Coalition is undergoing an organizational transition that has far-reaching implications for the progressive movement in the United States. Coalition members agree that it must expand to reflect the interests of nearly 7 million people who voted for Jesse Jackson in the primaries last year. But how do the membership gains of the campaign merge with existing structures? How does the coalition build a politically empowering organization accountable to its expanding base? And what is its relationship to the Democratic Party?

Some activists worry that the coalition is not organizing fast enough, not setting program priorities or flexing its political muscle. Jackson urges action on voter registration, South Africa sanctions, child care and other agreed-upon issues, yet he counsels patience when it comes to restructuring. Nevertheless, next month a commission named in December by the National Rainbow Coalition Board is scheduled to report back with a reorganization proposal.

Most board members agree that the coalition should be a membership organization. The question is, What kind? Jackson favors the "common ground" model, which sets up no ideological tests and thus assumes an ongoing capacity for growth in unexpected places. Jackson believes in "going to the point of challenge"—be it a farm foreclosure, picket line or gay rights march—and forging solidarity. He feels this approach works better than the oft-tried and oft-failed efforts to build a progressive movement with outreach programs and education pegged to an agenda of broad social change.

Tensions have arisen as the coalition tries to cultivate common ground without fencing it off into ideological corrals—the activists in one pen, elected officials in another, for example. Many left activists throughout the country were involved with the Jackson campaign. But some who were not accuse local politicians of shutting them out, and still others thought the campaign detracted from "building the Rainbow." More widespread is the charge, often stated self-righteously by white leftists, that some black elected officials are undermining the coalition by opportunistically riding on Jackson's coattails to advance their own careers.

"If they allow me to stand on their shoulders, I'll give them my coattails," says Jackson. He stresses the generally progressive, though non-monolithic, nature of African-American officialdom: Its representatives fought for the right to vote, campaigned under difficult circumstances and now struggle to deliver basic services at a time of rising need, collapsing inner cities and budget cuts. "Some people," says Jackson, "have the freedom and time to take on cutting-edge issues without the responsibility for everyday survival issues." He calls for "a real appreciation for the value of each patch in the Rainbow quilt."

Many coalition members see an unprecedented opportunity to transform the Democratic Party. As Jackson says, the non-Rainbow Democrats "are not worried that we might leave but that we might stay, and they might have to adjust." One important signal of the party's willingness to

adapt will be sent early next month, when Democrats pick a national chair to succeed Paul Kirk. The contenders are four mainstream Democrats plus Ron Brown, Jackson's 1988 convention manager.

Jackson and many others in the coalition see the Democratic Party as the most promising electoral vehicle; but they are prepared to adopt new tactics if the promise proves hollow. Liz Blum, co-chair of the Vermont Rainbow Coalition, thinks that taking over the Democratic Party is a "pipe dream." She and many others on the left feel that an electoral agenda should be secondary to building an issue-based movement, and some would seek that goal by beginning now to construct a third party.

Jesse Jackson is at once the leader of the Rainbow Coal-

tion and its core African-American constituent, the de facto Democratic front-runner in the 1992 presidential race and, in the words of one board member, the U.S. leader seen globally as "responsive to people's needs, crises, tragedies."

The Rainbow Coalition is striving to shape a recognized, unified leadership to complement Jackson's special role and strategic spontaneity. The challenge is to build a common ground coalition flexible enough to withstand the political tremors that so often shake the left and strong enough to produce an enduring progressive movement. HOLLY SKLAR

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UNCIVIL LIBERTIES.

CALVIN TRILLIN

A few weeks ago, I turned down an opportunity to worry about the litter in space. It happened when a man who was being interviewed on television said that as many as 7,200 objects, most of them the sort of thing that a good citizen might drop in the nearest trash receptacle, are orbiting the Earth. Just as soon as I heard the man say that, I heard myself say, "Well, none of them belong to me."



I think you could call it an instinctive response, familiar to anyone who grew up with a sibling—a sister in my case—and thus became accustomed to using as his first line of defense, "I'm not going to clean up her mess!" I wasn't denying that there's a problem. The man being interviewed said that if an astronaut who is unscrewing some little thingamajig outside the space capsule happens to drop his glove, the glove doesn't drop. It goes into orbit forever. So it stands to reason that the place needs some tidying.

To appreciate what the litter problem in space is like all you have to do is visualize what would happen if any glove dropped right here on Earth went into orbit instead of dropping. If you want to look on the bright side of that, I suppose there might be a chance of finding a lost glove of your own when it came around again, assuming it hadn't run into anything on the way, but the odds on that would be pretty long. I can't think of anything else on the bright side. The gloves lost by my children alone would be enough to turn the sky dark with gloves. You couldn't walk down the street without being pummeled by fancy silk gloves and heavy ski gloves and catcher's mitts. The sides of skyscrapers, windows and all, would be covered with layer after layer of third graders' mittens.

So I wasn't doubting that the man on the news was talking about a genuine problem. But I thought the most honest and straightforward thing to do was to explain to him right away that I wasn't planning to treat it as my own personal problem right at that time. The way I felt about it was this: I don't expect the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to worry about my Diners Club bill, so I'm sure they

don't expect me to worry about their space litter.

"After all, I didn't lose any gloves up there," I said to my wife, when I explained to her that I wasn't going to concentrate a lot of my concern on the junk in space. "In fact, the more I think about it the more I think that space may be the only place I've never lost a glove. If I had caused any of the litter, you know I'd be the first one trying to figure out how to get it cleaned up. But remember what my Army sergeant used to say when we were policing the general area. He said, 'The guy who dropped it is the guy who's going to pick it up.'"

"You always told me that when you were policing the general area your Army sergeant said, 'If it'll move, pick it up; if it won't move, paint it,'" my wife said.

"Well, the principle's the same," I said.

"It seems to me the principle's completely different," she said. "One way, you're responsible only for what you dropped. The other way, you're responsible for everything, whether you dropped it or not."

I realized she was absolutely right, so I said, "You had to have been in the Army to understand."

Then I started trying to figure out what I could do about the litter in space. At just that moment, I suppose, NASA started trying to figure out what it could do about my Diners Club bill.

"I was thinking maybe we could send people up to stand on space stations with large versions of butterfly nets," I said to my wife. "On the other hand, not much of that stuff is likely to come close enough to take a swipe at. After all, there's a lot of space in space. Thus the name."

"I'd keep that idea to myself, if I were you," my wife said.

"I don't suppose it would be practical to put rugs in orbit to sweep it under," I said. "Also, you've got the problem of where the under is in that situation."

"Maybe you shouldn't treat this as your personal problem," my wife said. "Remember what your sergeant said."

"I think you're right," I said. "When it comes right down to it, the people who have been there in space made the mess. And if they didn't, it must have been my sister."